



The mindful consumer: Balancing egoistic and altruistic motivations to purchase local food



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ABSTRACT

Today's more "mindful" consumers' food consumption decisions are changing as they attempt to balance egoistic and altruistic motivations. This study explores the relative importance of these types of motivations in influencing Australian consumers' attitudes towards, and purchase frequency of, local food. Factors examined include ethical self-identity, environmental consciousness, health consciousness and food safety. Results indicate egoistic motivations may influence local food consumption decisions more strongly than altruistic motivations. Recommendations for producers and retailers of local food in appealing to more "mindful" consumers suggest more focused marketing and communication strategies, clearer branding and labelling of produce, and training of service staff.

1. Introduction

Consumers have become increasingly disengaged by distant and impersonal industrialised food production and distribution systems controlled by larger multinational enterprises (Autio et al., 2013; Feagan, 2007). Many are concerned about the adverse consequences and lack of transparency surrounding existing global food systems, particularly negative environmental impacts, sustainability and health, and food safety issues (de Jonge et al., 2008; Dukeshire et al., 2011; Eden et al., 2008; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002). This has been exacerbated by a number of high profile food safety crises over the past two decades, including Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Foot and Mouth Disease and the Horsemeat Scandal in the UK (Barbarossa et al., 2016; BBC News, 2013; Grunert, 2005; Morris and Buller, 2003; Tregear and Ness, 2005) and salmonella in Australian peanut paste (Powell, 2012). Such food scares have amplified consumers' awareness of food supply chain activities and the potential health risks associated with them. This, alongside increasing concern over production and supply methods has fuelled interest in the provenance, sourcing and traceability of produce further.

Across the globe, this growing lack of trust in the dominant agro-industrial food paradigm has led to a consumer backlash whereby many consumers are choosing to source more 'local food'. Indeed Mintel Group Pty Ltd (2017) found consumers ranked 'British-made' and 'locally-sourced' as two of the most important factors when shopping for food and drink. This has led to an increase in specialist retailers who are

appealing to consumers desire for localism through their use of local producers and short supply chains, with sales through specialist food and drink stores found to be worth over £12.4 billion in 2015 and set to increase by 6% to an estimated value of £13.2 billion by 2021 (Mintel Group Pty Ltd, 2017). In Australia, over 90% of fresh food on Australian tables is grown and produced by local (Australian) farmers (DAFF, 2012). Despite much of this being sold through the two dominant supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths, the local food movement in Australia is gaining momentum as illustrated through the increased popularity of farmers markets and food festivals (Caskey, 2014).

The local food movement is a "search for food with integrity" (Ikerd (2011), p. 52), with local food becoming increasingly fashionable as people become more concerned with issues of lifestyle and "food purism" (Heslop, 2007, p. 29). Knight (2013), p. 29 argues that "localness is one of the hottest trends in the world of food" with more socially responsible and ethically-minded food consumers seeking "environmentally and socially sustainable food" (Selfa and Qazi, 2005, p. 452). Indeed, ethical consumption involving choice based on personal and moral beliefs (Carrigan et al., 2004) and with a stronger focus on social concerns is growing across a wide range of product categories (Bucic et al., 2012), and this is particularly the case for food. However, despite the notion that the consumption of local food may provide individual and societal benefits, limited studies have focused on what underlying motives drive a person to purchase such produce.

A review of the extant literature reveals numerous drivers and barriers influencing local food purchasing which aim to understand

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why (or why not) consumers consume local food. However, whilst these studies focus on uncovering the main reasons or ‘drivers’ behind consumer decision-making with regard to local food (e.g., FSA, 2007; IGD, 2005; Megicks et al., 2012; Weatherell et al., 2003), research into the types of motivation underlying these decisions has received rather less attention. Identifying whether these stem from an individual's self-interest (i.e., egoistic motivations) or wider social concerns (i.e., altruistic motivations) would aid retailers and manufacturers’ decision-making in a plethora of ways e.g., advertising, labelling, positioning, etc. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on the role of egoistic and altruistic motivations in local food consumption. It seeks to establish how these seemingly contradictory motivations are balanced in the consumer's mind during the decision-making process. To do so it investigates health consciousness and concern for food safety (egoistic motivations) along with ethical self-identity and environmental consciousness (altruistic motivations) and how they affect beliefs and purchase frequency of local food.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining local food and factors driving its purchase

The term ‘local food’ is most commonly used to describe “local food systems or short food chains where the food is produced near the consumer” (Roininen et al., 2006, p. 20). However, defining the ‘locality’ aspect of local food has led to a number of interpretations and much debate (see for example, Durham et al., 2009; Feldmann and Hamm, 2015; Lang et al., 2014; Morris and Buller, 2003; Ricketts Hein et al., 2006), but is generally based around two characteristics: the origin of the produce and consumer recognition of the produce coming from a local source (Pearson et al., 2011).

Past studies have found a range of drivers to purchasing local food, including ethical considerations, e.g., support for local farmers, producers and retailers (Bianchi and Mortimer, 2015; Dukeshire et al., 2011; Memery et al., 2015; Mintel Group Pty Ltd, 2015), environmental concerns (Kareklas et al., 2014; Tregear and Ness, 2005), food provenance and traceability (IGD, 2012; Megicks et al., 2012), and food safety (Bellows et al., 2010). In addition factors relating to health consciousness, e.g., nutritional value (Selfa and Qazi, 2005), food quality, e.g., taste, freshness, (Chambers et al., 2007; Roininen et al., 2006; Murphy, 2011), and more traditional shopping requirements, e.g., convenience, availability, and price (Chambers et al., 2007; Tregear and Ness, 2005) have also been found to be important. Furthermore, local food consumption can be viewed as a global phenomenon with similar drivers of local food purchasing being seen across international boundaries. For example, UK consumers select local food for better taste, to support local growers, reduce environmental damage, patriotism, freshness, safety and better quality (Kemp et al., 2010); critical drivers for US consumers are freshness, taste, and nutritional value, followed by support for local farmers, availability, appearance, price, variety, grown locally, environmentally friendly, easy to prepare, and organically grown (Selfa and Qazi, 2005); and likewise, Australian consumers consider important drivers to be freshness, flavour, support of local production and traceability (PIRSA, 2010).

A number of food choice studies have centred around motivational and attitudinal influences on consumption behaviour that have helped further understand consumers food buying behaviour generally (e.g., Furst et al., 1996; Keane and Williets, 1994; Shepherd, 1990), as well as in relation to specific food types e.g. green foods (Je Schuitema and De Groot, 2015), organic produce (e.g., Nasir and Karakaya, 2014) and genetically modified food (e.g., Burton et al., 2001). However, whilst these have established the main reasons or ‘drivers’ behind consumers decisions to purchase local food (e.g., COI/FSA, 2007; IGD, 2005; Megicks et al., 2012), limited studies have delved deeper into the types of motivation underlying these decisions i.e., egoistic and altruistic. Identifying how these motivations affect buying behaviour and beliefs

with regard to local food will help gain greater insight into the consumer psyche and assist local producers to more effectively target their markets.

2.2. Egoistic versus altruistic motivations influencing the purchase of local food

The consumption of locally produced food has been associated with intrinsic and extrinsic qualities, as well as, societal benefits (Knight, 2013). Extrinsic qualities of local food concerning marketing related factors (e.g., price, branding, packaging, labelling, promotion) are typically associated with barriers to local food purchasing (Megicks et al., 2012). However, extrinsic qualities such as environment, welfare and origin (Tregear and Ness, 2005), as well as intrinsic qualities and societal benefits can be related to drivers of such consumption. These, in turn, can be linked to different types of motivation, with intrinsic qualities (e.g., quality, appearance, freshness, taste, healthiness, safety) being associated with egoistic motivations or self-interest, and selected extrinsic qualities and societal benefits (e.g., supporting local producers, retailers and economies, preserving agricultural land, increased food security) with altruistic motivations or doing ‘wider good’.

Past research indicates differences in which types of qualities/benefits (and hence motivations) are most influential in consumers local food purchasing decisions. Knight (2013) found intrinsic qualities (e.g., taste) associated with egoistic motivations or self-interest were the most important benefits, while social benefits associated with altruistic motivations were of secondary importance. Support for this was found from MacMillan Uribe et al. (2012) who revealed that consistent supply of safe and nutritious quality (egoistic), followed by local support for farmers and being environmentally sustainable (altruistic) were key advantages of community supported agriculture membership. Conversely, other studies have found that the social benefits associated with altruistic motivations, including support for local farmers, producers and retailers (Birch, 2012; Memery et al., 2015; Mintel Group Pty Ltd, 2015), ethical consumption and concern for the environment (Megicks et al., 2008), are the most important considerations when purchasing local food. Whereas Kareklas et al. (2014) found that egoistic and altruistic factors concurrently predicted consumers’ attitudes and purchase intentions toward organic food.

Whilst a number of studies have looked at what drives decision-making regarding food choice, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of egoistic and altruistic motivations in the purchase of local food. To do this, the study focuses on key qualities and benefits identified through the literature as being linked to these motivations, namely health consciousness and food safety (egoistic), and environmental concern and ethical issues (altruistic), which will now be discussed further.

2.2.1. Egoistic motivation factors

Health consciousness concerns the extent to which a person is aware of, and concerned about, their health and the health of those close to them (Gould, 1988). It reflects the willingness of a person to engage in healthy behaviours and undertake actions directed at improving their health, quality of life and well-being (Becker et al., 1977; Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008). Dutta-Bergman (2005), p. 4) argues that health orientation or health conscious behaviour arises from “an intrinsic interest rather than an interest that is prompted by situational factors in the environment”. Health involvement or interest in eating healthy foods has been found to be closely correlated with food consumption (Marshall and Bell, 2004; Pieniak et al., 2008), and in particular, for fruit and vegetables and organic and free range products (Brunso and Scholderer, 2001; Michaelidou and Hassan, 2010; Nasir and Karakaya, 2014). Health consciousness has also been found to be a key driver of local food consumption (Weatherell et al., 2003), although others have found taste to be a stronger predictor of food choice than health (Brunso et al., 2009; Wardle, 1993).

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